

My 13 Golden Rules Of Twitter

BUSINESS NEWS

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Today, I will reach 50,000 followers on Twitter. I'm obviously honored, but the truth is the reason I've been able to grow so much in the space in the last year is because of you, my blog readers and my followers. You have told me what you want from me, whether it's a salary stat or the numbers behind a certain sponsorship. You have given me information for me to tweet out to the masses and you have even proven me wrong. For that, I thank you. As we begin to think about 2011, I think about social media and Twitter in particular and how I can only see a big future for how sports fans will use the site in the coming year. I don't consider myself the ultimate expert on this topic of course, but I thought I'd try to come up with a list of the most important things I've learned about Twitter in the past year. There will be many sports references in here because that's the area I play in, but this advice is obviously pretty generic. If you don't follow me on Twitter, you can find me [@darrenrovell](#).

1. You don't have a 140 characters, you have 120 at the most

Remember, Twitter is not a monologue, it is a dialogue. You want people to engage with you, you want people to retweet you. If you use all 140 characters, the only choice they have is to click the retweet button, which means they can't comment on it. I've found that my ideal tweets are about 100 characters. Including my 12-letter name, an RT, a space and the @ symbol, that's 116 characters. My followers then have 24 characters to say what they want. Your number of characters are precious, so use link shortening sites like [bit.ly](#) or [is.gd](#) to reduce the amount of letters in your tweet.

2. This Isn't A Popularity Contest

Twitter isn't Facebook. It's not a contest to collect as many friends as possible (I'll follow you, if you follow me). If you genuinely use Twitter to follow others, you don't want to clog your timeline with useless banter. Some people collect followers in order to grow their following. Don't be in this business. If you are to use Twitter effectively, it's not a popularity contest. I have found that if you truly are interested in using your Twitter feed, you can follow up to about 700 people. After that, a Twitter feed isn't going to be an effective tool for you. Pare down your list every month so that you will be able

to keep up with your changing interests and people who you realize aren't providing you with useful information. If you pique interest, people will follow you. Trust me.

3. Follow The Right People

Many who say that Twitter is a waste of time simply don't take the time to follow the right people. Twitter is actually a time saver. If you follow the right people, you will be more efficient since the news is coming to you, rather than you going to it. You will find out news and information faster than if you went to search it out yourself. The easy way to follow the right people is to look at who is following you. They also might be worth following and since Twitter's "Find People" and "Who To Follow" tabs are shaky at best, it's often one of the best ways to make sure you are following the right people.

4. Know Who Follows You And Why People Follow You

You are followed for a reason. If it's just your group of friends, you can write inside jokes all day that they'll all understand. If you are followed by people outside your circle, doing that will only encourage them to leave. If you're a comedian, be funny. If you don't have something funny to say, don't tweet it. If you're a sports writer, tweet about sports, not what is at your family's Thanksgiving table. Stick to your strengths.

5. Personal Tweets Are Fine Every Once In A While

I'm a sports business reporter, so I know that my followers rely on me to tweet about sports business. But I also love food and love to just observe strange things in life. This week, I went to the supermarket and saw a product I really loved. I [took a picture of it](#), tweeted it out and it got more than 5,500 views. I want people to understand who I am as a person. I try to achieve a 90-10 ratio. Ninety percent of my tweets are going to be about sports business, the rest could be personal though definitely pass the interesting test. Former tennis player Justin Gimelstob tweeted a picture of his earwax once. It works because people follow him because he's eccentric.

6. Don't Be Afraid To Have More Than One Account

If I'm following you because I like your take on college football, I don't want to all of sudden be bombarded by a stream of play by play tweets for UAB basketball because you graduated from there. If you want to, have a fan account that focuses on an area that isn't the main reason people are following you, open up another account. Trust me, it will save you from losing followers. Colleges especially have to be careful with this. I follow a Northwestern fan feed because I want to follow play-by-play of the games on my Twitter feed. But Northwestern only provides a fan feed that allows me to see play-by-play of all teams. I don't want baseball and softball scores cluttering my feed. In this case, feeds should be broken down by sports. Companies not only need to be on Twitter, but they have to have a variety of different usernames. Some people just want coupons or rebates and they don't want to hear about every store opening. No one said you could only have one name.

7. People Love Pictures

Some of my most successful tweets have been when I've simply taken a picture off the television. Like this shot of Patrick Ewing [eating popcorn without his hands](#), while Orlando Magic coach Stan Van Gundy tried to give his halftime speech. To think that I just happened to catch that moment in time off the TV, and it was funny enough that 10,000 people viewed, is pretty remarkable.

8. Know When To Tweet

If you are tweeting during a big game, it's obviously appropriate to tweet immediately, but if you have something that you consider gold, you should hold it until you have the greatest audience. Just because Twitter is an instant publishing tool doesn't mean you have to publish everything instantly. I don't have any data to support overall Twitter trends, but — if all else is equal — I find that my content is most likely to get retweeted during the 9:30 am to 11 am ET timeframe. My tweets written before 7 am and after 10 pm are usually fighting the odds. That's why it's smart to save tweets for the perfect time.

9. There's No Such Thing As Tweeting Too Much

Are there a number of tweets per day that make people unfollow you? I've had people tell me that you can only tweet so much before people get tired with you clogging up their timeline. Not true. If you tweet quality, no one will stop following you. People don't get annoyed with your number of tweets. They get annoyed with the number of your tweets that are bad.

10. The Collective Twitterverse Is Smarter Than You

Use Twitter as a tool. Is what you think about a certain something indicative of how this nation thinks about it? If you want to understand more about this read James Surowiecki's brilliant book, "The Wisdom Of Crowds." It was written in 2004, but if you read it today and think about Twitter, it makes so much more sense. If I'm not sure about how I feel about something, I often poll my Twitter followers and many times I instantaneously discover that my opinion is in minority. Read your @ mail. That's not only to see who retweeted you, but also for suggestions on content. People who have six people following them smartly send me things to consider for a retweet. A guy sent me a cool Zamboni desk garbage. I tweeted it and gave him credit. Another follower of mine asked what was in the Under Armour combine gift bag? I found out, blogged it, and tweeted out the link. All they want is you to give them credit by mentioning their username. That's not a lot to ask for the intellectual capital they are giving me in exchange. Sports teams and companies use Twitter to tell you what they are doing. They should also use the collective wisdom of the crowds on Twitter to find out what you think they should do. You might be the director of marketing for a team and you might think you've dreamed up every promotion. Well guess what? The totality of your fan base can do better than you. Don't be scared to cross that bridge.

11. Don't Trust Everything That Is Tweeted

If you are retweeting something that involves news, make sure the original tweet is from a reputable source. I've been on the wrong end of a retweet gone bad and it's not pretty. I even remember the date I did it because it burns that much. As more and more people retweet it, Twitter becomes like a game of telephone. The original source gets taken off and you are then left being the one that is reporting the news. Someone tweeted that ESPN Radio was saying that Magic Johnson was going to buy the Jacksonville Jaguars and move them to Los Angeles. When I contacted the person who tweeted it out, he told me that he wasn't sure, but his friend told him that ESPN Radio said it. The guy didn't seem to care because he wasn't a journalist and there wasn't any consequences for his misfire. Others aren't as fortunate.

12. People Want To Laugh

No matter what you cover, or how you choose to tweet, humor is highly valued on Twitter. There's something magical about one sentence that can make you laugh. When one of my tweets gets on the front page of Twitter, odds are it made people laugh.

13. Walk Away

Unlike people that blog, where you have to continue to feed the beast, you can walk away from Twitter every once in a while. People won't stop following you if you step back. It's healthy to do that every once in a while, though I can't tell you the last time I did that.

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